

German Foreign Policy

International Relations

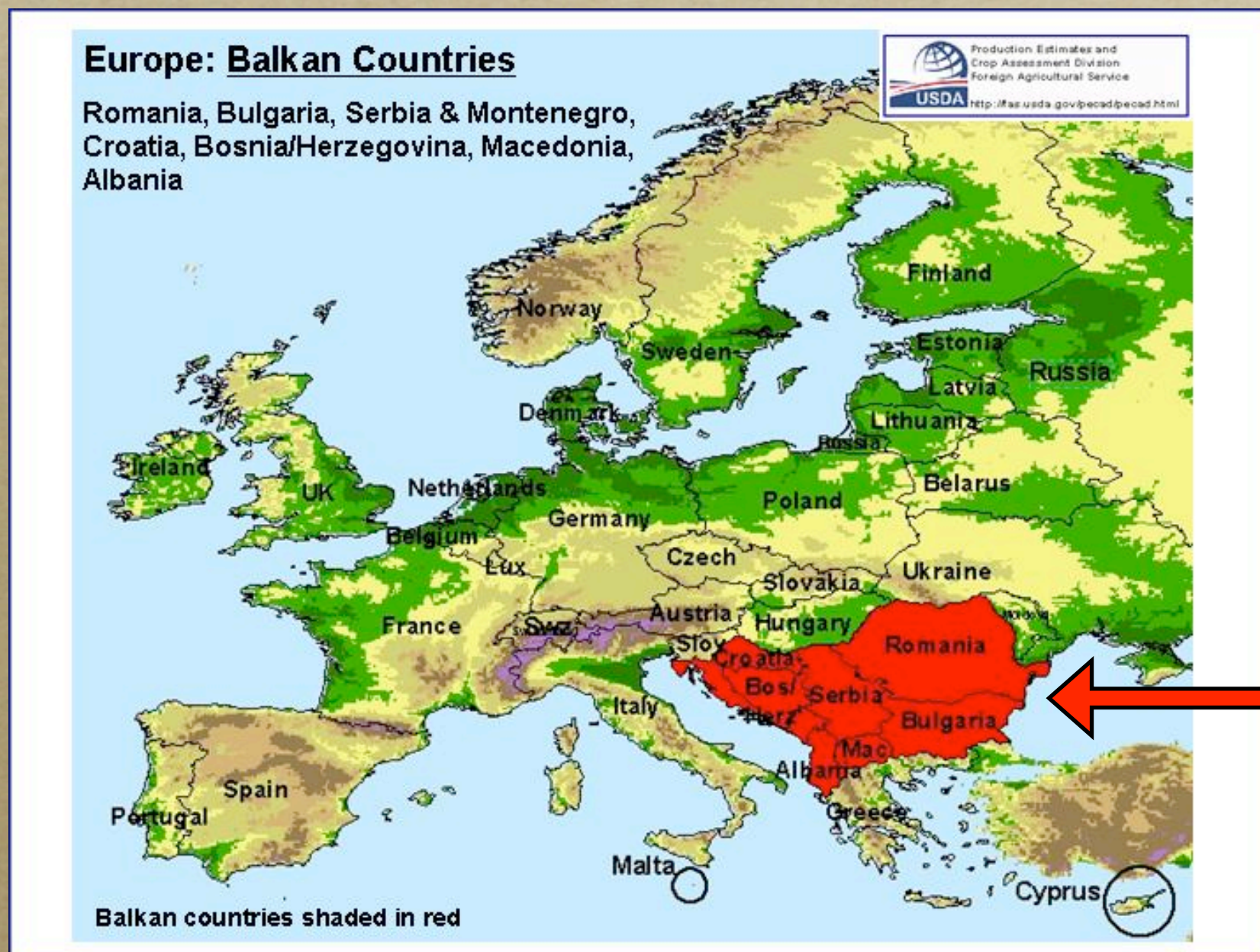
1871 - 1914

Part 2

Trouble in the Balkans

It can be quite painful!

- *In the late 19th century the Turkish Empire in south-east Europe was collapsing and Russia and Austria-Hungary were rivals to take it over.*



The Balkans

Congress of Berlin 1878



- *Bismarck called this meeting of European powers in an attempt to act as the 'Honest Broker' between the two rivals' claims on the Balkans, and while he succeeded in avoiding war on this occasion, it became obvious that he had favoured Austria and would not be able to keep Russia on his side in the future.*
- *This brought the Dreikaiserbund to an end and Bismarck now abandoned his policy of avoiding formal alliances and made a firm alliance with Austria-Hungary: The Dual Alliance*

Bismarck's Web of Alliances

- ☑ **1879** *Dual Alliance*
- ☑ **1881** *Dreikaiserbund renewed*
- ☑ **1882** *Triple Alliance - renewed and strengthened in 1887*
- ☑ **1887** *Reinsurance Treaty*



The Dual Alliance 1879

- *The Dual Alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary was created by treaty on October 7, 1879.*
- *In it, Germany and Austria-Hungary pledged to aid one another in case of an attack by Russia.*
- *Also, each state promised benevolent neutrality to the other if one of them was attacked by another European power (generally taken to be France).*
- *Some historians have argued that this alliance made a Franco-Russian alliance inevitable in the future.*

Dreikaiserbund Renewed

1881

- *The League was resurrected in 1881 after Russia realized their anger toward Germany was quite dangerous with the new Austro–German Alliance in place, approached Bismarck to renew the Three Emperors’ League as Bismarck expected.*
- *The league lasted until 1886 when Russia refused the renewal of the Three Emperors’ league due to increase in distrust between Austria and Russia.*

Triple Alliance 1882

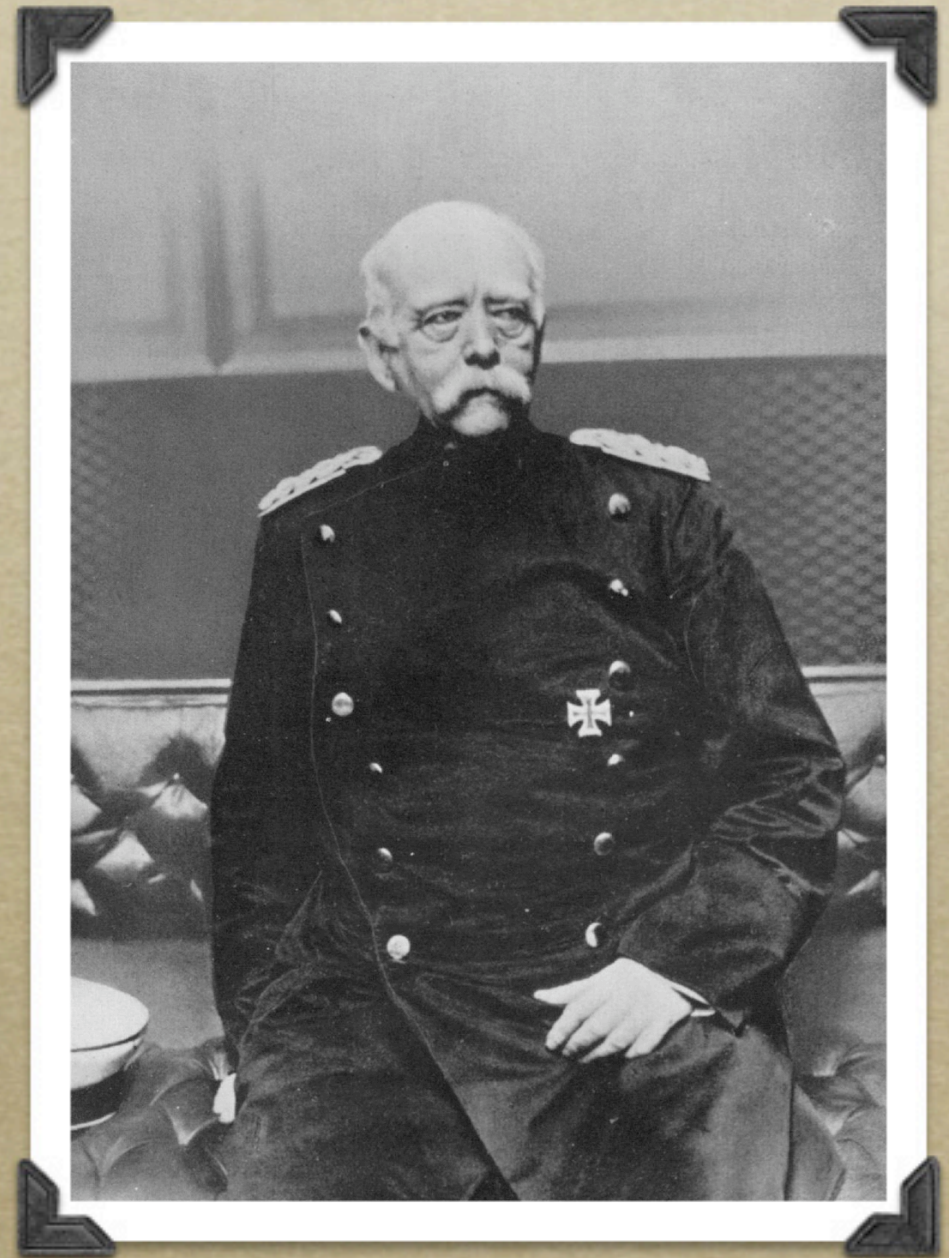
- *In 1882 Italy was added to the Dual Alliance to form the Triple Alliance.*
- *The Triple Alliance was a military alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy that lasted until the start of World War I in 1914.*
- *Each member promised mutual support in the event of an attack by any two other great powers, or for Germany and Italy, an attack by France alone.*
- *This furthered Bismarck's aim of isolating France by depriving her of another potential ally.*

Reinsurance Treaty 1887

- *The Reinsurance Treaty (June 18, 1887) was an attempt by Bismarck to continue to keep on good terms with Russia after the League of the Three Emperors broke down.*
- *Bismarck felt that this was essential to continue the diplomatic isolation of France so ensuring German security.*
- *The **secret treaty** stated that:*
 - ***Germany and Russia** both agreed to observe neutrality should the other be involved in a war with the third. Neutrality would not apply should Germany attack France or Russia attack Austria-Hungary.*

Verdict on Bismarck - FOR

- *Bismarck's main aim was to keep Europe at peace to allow the consolidation of the new German state. This he achieved for the twenty years he was in control, despite being faced with the difficult tasks of isolating France and maintaining good relationships with the fierce rivals in the Balkans: Russia and Austria-Hungary. With great diplomatic skill he constructed an intricate network of alliances which tied the other powers to Germany and maintained the balance of power in Germany's favour.*
- *A measure of his greatness was the inability of his successors to grasp the need, let alone execute, the policies which German security needed. Without him at the helm, Germany was soon on a course which led to ultimate disaster.*



(See P. 106 of textbook for historians' views on Bismarck's foreign policy.)

Verdict on Bismarck -AGAINST

- *While maintaining peace during his time in power, it was inevitable that without him, the structure would collapse - it was too dependent on his skills. Even if he had continued in control it is doubtful if he could have sustained the stability.*
- *Germany could not avoid French hostility and keep it in isolation forever.*
- *Germany could not prevent Russia and Austria-Hungary antagonism indefinitely and Germany had already drawn closer to Austria-Hungary.*
- *Bismarck's edifice of alliances had been made necessary by his own pre-1871 policies and the structure was basically unsound. The alliance system, which he had started, was be one of the main causes of the First World War because they turned a local Balkan war into a major European war. In the long term Bismarck's policies led to disaster.*
- *Bismarck also stands accused of conducting a dishonest foreign policy which created an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust among the nations. This culture of secrecy and deceit led to the failures in diplomacy causing the First World War.*

Kaiser Wilhelm II

- *In 1888 Kaiser Wilhelm II came to the throne of Germany*
- *He was a somewhat unstable, arrogant vain and impulsive man who had great plans for Germany. Bismarck said of him: “The Kaiser is like a balloon, if you don’t keep fast hold of the string, you never know where he will be off to.” (See P. 109 of textbook for details of Wilhelm II’s character).*
- *He had no intention of continuing with Bismarck’s cautious foreign policy.*



Bismarck Dismissed

The new Kaiser and Bismarck did not agree on many policies and in 1890 Wilhelm sacked him.

*This was depicted in a famous cartoon - **Dropping the Pilot** - which shows Bismarck leaving the ship of state, which he has guided safely for so long, while the new young master of the ship, Kaiser Wilhelm II, looks on.*



Kaiser's Foreign Policy

- *Wilhelm II was an impatient and impulsive man who had grandiose plans for Germany. He immediately dispensed with Bismarck's careful foreign policy.*
- *In 1890 Russia wanted a renewal of the Reinsurance Treaty of 1887 but the Kaiser refused as it ran contrary to Germany's Triple Alliance and he felt his personal relationship with the Tsar (cousins) would be enough to maintain diplomatic ties with Russia.*
- *However, Russia was feeling isolated and vulnerable (her relations with Britain were not good at this point) and it was a natural development that France and Russia should form an alliance. The Franco-Russian Alliance of 1892 (or Dual Alliance - confusing isn't it) was exactly what Bismarck had worked so hard to avoid - the possibility in the future of a war on two fronts. In the inept hands of the Kaiser all Bismarck's hard work was being rapidly undone. Another major step had been taken in the creation of the system of alliances which contributed to the outbreak of the First World War.*

Weltpolitik & Imperialism

- *The Kaiser had huge ambitions for Germany and he abandoned Bismarck's conservative policy over colonies and embarked on a policy of Weltpolitik (World Policy) whereby Germany was to carry out a vigorous expansionist foreign policy to acquire an extensive **overseas empire** (Germany's 'place in the sun') and build a **large navy**. Both these actions had to been purposefully avoided by Bismarck for fear of becoming involved in disputes with other countries and in particular to avoid making a potential enemy of Britain.*

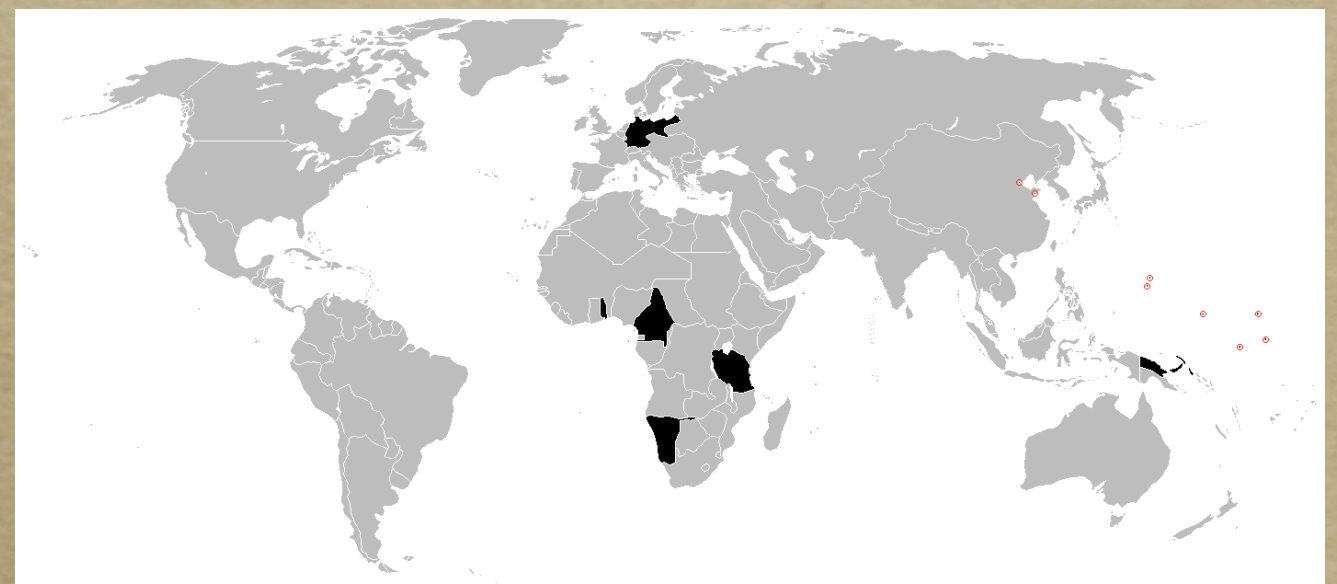


Weltpolitik & Imperialism

- *The Kaiser's ambitions were motivated by his pompous nationalism and a personal jealousy of Britain (the British monarchs were all related to the Kaiser - at the outbreak of the First World War the leaders of Britain, Russia and Germany were all cousins). He envied Britain its powerful navy and huge overseas empire. Germany had missed out on the period of rapid colonial expansion in the late 19th century as the maps below show.*
- *There was also intense pressure within Germany for expansion overseas from pressure groups such as The Navy League, The Colonial League and the Pan-German League. They wanted room for an expanding German population, a supply of raw materials and a market for German goods.*



British Empire



German Empire

The Kaiser and Britain

- *In 1890, due to Bismarck's careful approach German/British relations were in a reasonably good state.*
- *However, the Kaiser's inept and tactless foreign policy managed to bring about an unlikely change in diplomatic relations by making an enemy of Britain, and worse still, causing Britain to establish friendly relations in the Entente Cordiale of 1904 with our long-term enemy and rival, France.*
- *How did the Kaiser manage to do this? A number of blunders and miscalculations were involved*
 - *The **Kruger Telegram, 1896** - The Kaiser sent a telegram to the leader of the Boers, Kruger, congratulating them on a success against the British in the Boer War in South Africa.*
 - *At the start of the 20th century the Kaiser ordered the building of the **Berlin-Baghdad Railway** which Britain regarded as a threat to its links to its empire.*
 - *The Kaiser further alienated Britain by making insulting remarks in a **Daily Telegraph** interview in 1908. "You English are mad, mad, mad as March hares."*

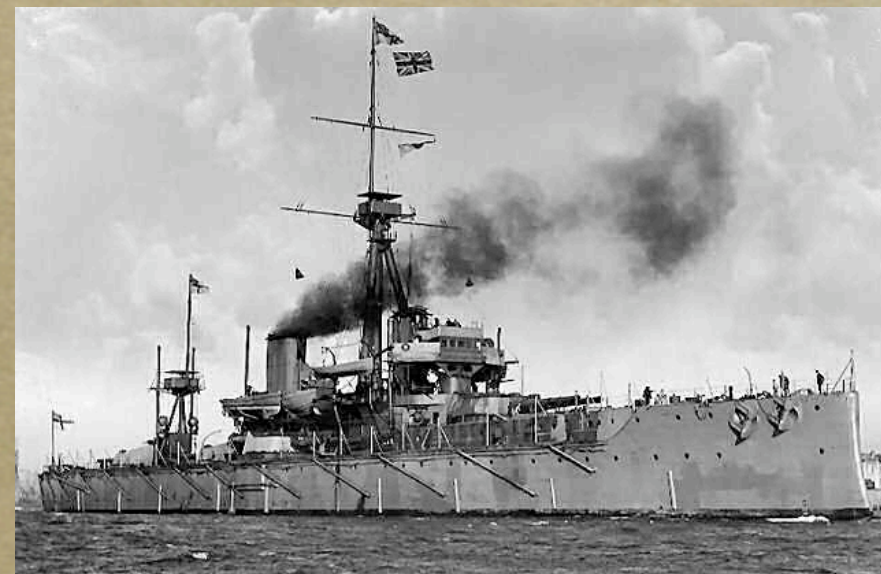
Naval Expansion

- *The biggest factor in the Kaiser's alienation of Britain was his decision to build a large navy. There was nothing Britain was more sensitive about as our navy gave us control of the seas to defend our island and empire.*
- *A powerful navy was Wilhelm's pet project. He had inherited, from his mother, a love of the British Royal Navy, which was at that time the world's largest. He once confided to his uncle, Edward VII, that his dream was to have a "fleet of my own some day".*
- *The Kaiser appointed Admiral Tirpitz to expand the German Navy and naval bills were passed in 1897 and 1900 with the intention of challenging Britain's dominance. A Naval Race developed between the two nations as they tried to outbuild each other, especially of the new Dreadnought type battleships which rendered all other ships obsolete.*

SMS Kaiser



Bundesarchiv, DVM 10 884-23-61-83
Foto: o. Ang. | 1913/1918 ca.



*HMS
Dreadnought*

The Road to War

- *The naval threat forced Britain into closer alliance with France and completed the formation of the two armed camps in Europe which led to the First World War.*
- *The Kaiser allowed the military high command to take over policy making, and to deal with the possibility of a war on two fronts Germany developed the Schlieffen Plan in 1905 which was ultimately to contribute to the escalation of the crisis which led to the war.*
- *Finally, the Kaiser allowed the military to give Germany's full backing to Austria-Hungary's aggressive action in the Balkans against Serbia which started the train of events which led to world war.*

Verdict

- *Two very different foreign policies: Bismarck intent on peace and in his time very successful, only to be replaced by the Kaiser with his ambitious and aggressive approach which contributed in a number of ways to the outbreak of war.*
- *This interpretation was in part due to the “Bismarck myth.” This was a view promoted by the man himself—which some would argue was confirmed by subsequent events—that, with the dismissal of the Iron Chancellor, Wilhelm II effectively destroyed any chance Germany had of stable and effective government. In this view, Wilhelm's "New Course" was characterised far more as the German ship of state going out of control, eventually leading through a series of crises to the carnage of the First and Second World Wars.*
- *But was it all so clear cut? Many recent reassessments have suggested that the seeds of war were planted in Bismarck's time. His structure was beginning to collapse even before 1890 and that even he would have found it very difficult to maintain the edifice after that date. He initiated the alliance systems and the secret diplomacy which started the process which led to destruction long before the Kaiser appeared with his ambitious and reckless policies.*

Past Paper Exam Questions

- 1996 *How far did the need for self-preservation influence the international relations of Germany between 1871 and 1914?*
- 1999 *How successfully did German foreign policy between 1871 and 1914 promote German interests?*
- 2002 *Assess the impact of nationalism on the international relations of Germany during the period 1871-1914.*
- 2004 *Discuss the view that German foreign policy between 1871 and 1914 created more problems than it solved.*